

How to Stop Self-Sabotage

6 Steps to Get the Relationship You Want



Everything you need to know to tame your inner critic
SPECIAL REPORT 2017



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Imagine you're sitting with your best friend catching up over coffee when you decide to share some news. This is big, significant news. It's news you've thought about sharing with someone you trust so you're excited, but it's also the kind of news that puts you in a vulnerable position. But of all the people in the world, you decide your friend is a person you can trust to be on your side. So you work up the courage and you tell her, "I have some big news to share with you..."

You make your big announcement - you share your hopes, fears, and insecurities. You're excited yet anxious to hear some kind words. But instead of encouragement and support, you hear something unexpected. You're met with harsh words that are hurtful and discouraging. Instead of being happy for you, your friend criticizes you. Your 'friend' doesn't feel like your friend at all – your friend feels like your enemy. You feel angry, hurt, rejected. Their words tear into your confidence and you start to doubt your decision, doubt your ability, and doubt your self-worth. Then something else happens – something worse! You begin to believe your friend is right. Your friend's doubts become yours and stick into your brain like a sliver you can't remove. You decide to put your plans on hold. Suddenly, your big news becomes a big bummer.

What would you do? For most of us the easy remedy would be to find a new friend. But what if the 'best friend' who's been belittling you isn't your friend at all? What if all these negative judgments are actually coming from within – from your own inner voice?

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This is a special report on the inner critic in all of us. Maybe you are reading this because you experience the harsh inner critic that stops you from taking action in your life. Perhaps you realize your inner dialogue holding you back, or worse, intentionally sabotaging your efforts. Do you get in the way of your dreams? Are you your own worst enemy?

Our brains are hardwired to make sense of our world. We assess risks. We assess our abilities to face challenges and changes in our environments and relationships. We interpret, analyze, and self-talk multiple times every day. Day after day we are faced with situations where we tell ourselves things to make sense of what is happening in our lives, in our relationships, in our jobs, with our personal development.

If we are hardwired to critique our abilities and competencies to understand ourselves better why do so many of us judge our behavior or let our negative thoughts prevent us from taking action we really want? What makes us so mean to ourselves? Where do these voices come from? Why do we choose to tell ourselves we are somehow lacking, that we are not good enough?

This special report is designed to tackle the topic of the inner critic, how and why we talk down to ourselves. We also discover how to be more realistic and truthful with ourselves and more accepting of our gifts, as well as our shortcomings. Basically, we learn how to keep the self-saboteur at bay.

The inner workings of the inner critic.

Can we get past the preaching's of our inner critic? Yes and no. You don't get past it, but you learn how to side step it when it shows up. The negative thoughts still intrude, but instead of repressing or denying them, you can learn how to invite them in. you defeat the inner critic not by pushing it away, you defeat it by embracing it. By accepting it, taming it, working with it and even transforming those negative thoughts it into a useful ally in your quest to find fulfillment and peace.

Negative thoughts can occur in a variety of situations in a typical day. This report focuses on the inner dialogue of negative self-talk that can interfere with us living healthy, fulfilling lives. What dialogue are we talking about? It's the kind of narrative that limits our belief in ourselves. It lowers our confidence and self-esteem that gets, and keeps us, stuck. We will explore how to make friends with the inner critic and, instead of being paralyzed by it, learn how to leverage it.

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So, put yourself back sitting down having a friendly coffee, but this time picture yourself alone with your thoughts. Here are some classic 'big news' scenarios along with some typical negative, inner critic responses. See if you can relate:

You're thinking about taking an art class but your inner critic says, *"Art class? I'm no artist. I'm just going to embarrass myself."*

You want to ask for that promotion you deserve, but your voice reminds you, *"I'm never going to get that promotion. There are other, smarter, more qualified people who want it so I have no chance. Why would I bother?"*

You see the perfect item on the rack and it's on sale, but your critic chimes in, *"I can't fit in that! Maybe 10 years ago, but I really let myself go. I should stick to bulkier clothes so I don't draw attention to how heavy I've let myself become."*

You've decided it's finally time to stop feeling tired and run down and you want to join an exercise class until, *"Why would I join a class? I never stick to anything. I'll just end up spending a bunch of money and skipping classes anyway. Face it, I'm too lazy to start working out at this stage of the game."*

You want to sign up for amateur open mic night, but stop dead in your tracks when you think to yourself, *“Who’d want to hear me anyway. I’ll probably freeze up and make a fool of myself like the last time I was on a stage.”*

You decide to start your own business until you tell yourself: *“I don’t have the discipline to run a business. I don’t need another disappointment in my life. I should stick with what I’m doing.”*

When trying something new and it doesn’t work out the way you planned you hear that little voice tell you, *“I suck!”*

Ouch.

With a friend like that who needs enemies, right? We all have private conversations with ourselves and they serve to either get, and keep, us on our path or knock us completely off course. If you relate to this kind of inner dialogue those ‘self-predictions’ can easily transform into life-limiting, self-fulfilling prophecies.

This report is divided into 4 sections. The first section is a brief introduction on the inner critic and how it can lead us to sabotaging our success. Section two focuses on self-sabotage and how it affects outcomes and the vicious, self-fulfilling prophetic cycle it creates. The third section introduces the 5-Step process to get your negative voice on your side. The final section summarizes the ideas in this report and is designed to inspire you to move forward.

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Sometimes it’s perfectly helpful and healthy for us to feel disappointed, regretful or even angry with ourselves when we don’t perform or produce the results we want. We all experience regrets for failing to live up to some of our expectations. It’s normal to stumble, to have passing negative thoughts about that stumble, to put those negative thoughts into perspective, give ourselves a pep talk and move on with our esteem intact. The trouble starts when we can’t let go of those negative interpretations. We get on the not-so-merry-go-round of negative inner thinking – a cycle that ends up impacting our self-esteem and confidence. It’s hard to make wise decisions when we’re tormented with self-doubt.

The occasional negative thoughts are important to notice, but we are going to focus on the kinds of inner dialogue that can crush our self-image, grind our actions to a halt and keep us in circumstances that are undesirable. We’re talking about the inner monologues that take the wind out of our sail for extended periods of time, monologues that alter our perception of who we really are and what we are capable of. These are the kinds of negative thinking that stifle our creativity, productivity and self-esteem.

Why The Inner Critic Always Seems to Give us the “Thumbs Down”

We all have an inner critic. That voice inside our head that shows up to criticize, frustrate or demean our behavior, our actions, or our decisions. It's the voice that makes us hesitate, second guess ourselves and question our competency. It's the voice that reminds us we may be rejected if we do what we want to do. Whether it's, “I should have...”, “I never do anything right...”, “Why did (didn't) I...?”, “What's the matter with me?”, “What's my problem?” “Who do I think I am?” the inner critic is a powerful force.

Times have changed, but our instincts haven't.

The critical inner voice is a distorted self-perception that's been adopted from our earliest life experiences. It was created after observing or experiencing hurtful events early in life and being responded to with negative behavior. Being shamed for breaking something by accident, for example, or watching one parent being chastised by the other for some infraction. From these repeated, painful events we've assimilated the destructive thought patterns towards ourselves. These influences have been internalized as our own outlook and now form our perceptions of ourselves, of others and of the world around us.

What's so bad about our inner critic?

The inner critic can get, and keep us, stuck in unrewarding relationships, careers and circumstances. Our critic sends us messages that promote anxiety and shame that serves to block motivation and interfere with our attempts to improve our lives.

To eliminate the stress that comes from anxiety and shame we avoid the situations, people and experiences that make us feel bad. We also naturally look for comfort to get us through the stress of anxiety and shame. How do we find comfort? Often by withdrawing, chronically procrastinating, turning down social engagements, spending too much time with unhealthy habits (excessive television, internet, constantly checking electronic devices, smoking, substance abuse, over eating, binge shopping, excessive rumination, etc.). Though these behaviors provide distraction and even some superficial relief it's temporary and, ultimately, self-defeating.

These temporary ‘remedies’ lead us further into a spiral of shame – we may tell ourselves that, “I should have gone out with my friends last night. Now they’re going to talk about how fun it was and I’ll feel like an outsider,” for example.

Missing out on a night on the town with friends is one thing, but what’s really troubling is the insidious nature of negative self-talk – we often don’t even realize we’re doing it. This leads to a faulty perception of ourselves (and others) that can lead us to mistakenly attribute our lack of success to our perceived inadequacy. ‘So what?’ you might ask, “Those are our own private conversations.” Well, all that negative internal criticism becomes a habit and by repeating this inner dialogue we reinforce the damaging messages and that can lead to inaction, which leads to more negative self-talk. Once negative self-talk becomes so ingrained in our daily thoughts we are often unaware we’re doing it. Left unchecked, our inner critical thoughts can lead to self-sabotage.

What Is Self-Sabotage?

Do you find yourself chronically delaying things you really want to do? Do you obsess with the past or the future at the expense of the present? Do you know what you need to do to get through a personal or professional obstacle, but feel scared, paralyzed even, and choose to avoid taking action? Do you find yourself trying to numb negative feelings? These acts may offer a temporary distraction and drown out the emotional pain, but serve to ultimately undermine us.

As you examine the following ideas choose one or two that you feel most interfere with your progress – the two that would be most helpful to change. Doing so will help reduce stress, judgment and anxiety and make room for the positive dialogue which leads to taking positive action.

Signs of self-sabotage:

- 1. Being obsessed with the past.** Whether it’s ruminating on past failures or romanticizing past successes, focusing on the past means missing out on the here and now. It’s difficult to discover new opportunities and plan our future when we’re stuck looking in the rear view mirror. Learning from the past is different than being a prisoner to it. Acknowledge the past - the painful experiences along with the triumphs - then let it go in order to move forward.
- 2. Predicting a negative future.** Convinced that pain in your hip means you’ll need months of physical therapy or hip replacement? Fixated on the mistake you made at work and certain you’ll be fired? Obsessing about negative events that may or may not happen in the future is a

sure sign of self-sabotage. The past can be a great teacher, but we can't change what's happened. Similarly, fixating on the future won't do anything to alter it. Only our actions in the present moment can do that.

3. Playing it safe. Being comfortable feels safe, but that comfort zone can easily become a rut. When you're not living up to your true potential, when you isolate yourself and feel unfulfilled with your results you may be playing it safe. Is it time to shake things up? Even small victories can boost confidence. What small risk could you take to nudge you out of your comfort zone?

4. Settling. When we underperform and are content with less than we know we deserve we are settling. Settling for less than we'd hoped comes down to fear – fear of rejection, disappointment, failure, and success - and that fear can lead to career, relationships and physical and mental health stagnation.

5. Blame shifting. When things don't go our way it's easy to shift the blame elsewhere. We blame the economy, our parents, the school system, the weather or Mercury in Retrograde. This creates apathy that, in turn, feeds our inaction and sabotages our efforts. We are responsible for our successes and our failures, our disappointments and our happiness. When we convince ourselves that our results are out of our hands we give away our power.

6. Comparing ourselves to others. Comparing ourselves to others can be a helpful habit when it motivates us to become better people. But when we compare ourselves to others and beat ourselves up for 'not measuring up', that's a self-sabotage red flag. The next time you're tempted to compare yourself to someone try the 5-10-15 approach. It works like this, write down the: 5 accomplishments you're most proud of; 10 skills you like the most about yourself, and; 15 adjectives describing your best qualities. Post it somewhere visible and use it as a reminder to keep focused on our own efforts and achievements instead of the accomplishments of others.

Breaking The Cycle

Negative thoughts are like weeds and any gardener will tell you, if you don't tend the weeds your garden will soon be overrun with them. The other truth about weeds is, regardless of how diligently you pull them, you can never fully eradicate them. Think of any paved parking lot with even a solitary weed poking its head up. The weeds will find a way.

So the goal is not to eliminate the inner critic. The real trick is to give that inner critic a voice. Acknowledge the negative. Give it oxygen. Only then can they be examined and dealt with.

The next time you are faced with that nagging inner critic try this 5-step process – you may even get to know, like and trust your inner critic.

Step #1 - Notice the negative message

Our negative self-talk can be so commonplace that we don't even consciously notice when we're doing it. To become more aware of your inner critic's voice notice when your mood or energy takes you into negative thinking when there hasn't been an incident to cause such a shift. If you notice a change, go back and ask yourself what you were just thinking about. You will often find that you have been engaging in negative self-talk without even realizing it.

Step #2 - Stop it in its tracks

Even if the negative thoughts are true, they are not healthy. So stop them immediately. You can use this simple technique from Prentice Mulford, a prominent thought pioneer from the 1800's. He said that we must deny access to those thoughts we don't want. He created a "thought refusal" tool in which he says,

"I refuse this thought and the mental condition it has brought on me which affects my body."

Step #3 - Question the thought for its truth.

We often accept our negative self-criticisms as truth without questioning their validity. The next time you become aware of a negative thought challenge it. Ask yourself if it's true or not. Pitting our negative thoughts against what is actually true can be a simple yet powerful exercise and a step towards shattering our negative misbelief.

Step #4 - Correct the inner critic by telling it the statement is untrue.

Now that you've acknowledged and challenged your inner critic it's time to replace the inaccurate assessments with the more accurate, empathetic truth. Instead of, "You're a loser and you'll never succeed," try, "I may not be perfect, but I tried my best and I got a pretty good result." Reframe the negative thoughts so they more accurately reflect the truth.

Step #5 - Reframe the negative "you" thought to a positive "I" statement.

"I" statements help us assert what we really believe by connecting us to what we're feeling. For example, the internal dialogue would shift from, "You never do anything right," to, "I feel frustrated and angry when the results don't reflect my efforts." Replacing "you statements" with "I statements" takes the negative charge out of our inner dialogue.

The siren call of the inner critic serves as an opportunity to challenge inaccurate thoughts and replace them with positive helpful ones. This 5 Step process can help. What does your inner critic tell you? What can you learn from it? How can you use that inner dialogue to help you improve your life?

Summary

Our inner critic has an insidious nature and often slips past our guard when our defenses are at their lowest – when we're tired, sick, hungry, frustrated or stressed out. It is so stealthy we hardly notice it's even happening until it's too late. Let unchecked, that voice encourages us to interfere with and sabotage our dreams, but only if we let it.

Perhaps the following bullet points will help reinforce what you've already learned:

- We all have an inner critic. That negative voice is a normal, learned behavior.
- It's healthy to express disappointment, regret or anger with ourselves when we don't perform or produce the results we want.
- When these temporary feelings become excessive we can end up on a not-so-merry-go-round of negative thoughts that end up impacting our self-esteem and confidence.
- Negative inner dialogue is a result of the painful messages from the past that we've learned to internalize.
- Left unchecked, that 'helpful' inner voice can be self-destructive.
- It's not unusual for negative inner dialogue to manifest as self-sabotage. It's common to be held back by the inner critic.
- Our inner critic sends us messages that promote anxiety and shame that serves to block motivation and interfere with our attempts to improve our lives.
- Self-sabotage also arises from focusing on the mistakes, the failures, what's not working, what's missing – basically placing disproportionate attention on what's 'wrong'.
- The 5 steps to make the inner critic your ally – Notice the negative message, stop the thought in its tracks, question the thought for its truth, correct the inner critic by telling it the statement is untrue, and reframe the negative "you" thought to a positive "I" statement.
- The ability to acknowledge the inner critic, to hear and reframe the message and take action based on the balanced truth offers an opportunity to break through self-sabotaging behavior and provides a chance for feeling the fulfillment that comes from pursuing our dreams.

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These private conversations that you have with yourself are powerful predictors of behavior and success. They can pull you up out of the mud when you fall down or be the boot that pins you to the ground. They can be the difference between busting through our personal barriers and giving up and settling for less.

As you apply what you've learned here chances are the inner critic may get quieter over time, but as soon as you let your guard down, tired, sick or otherwise vulnerable they will reassert themselves – that's just the way it works. Now you are equipped to deal with it when it happens.

“You can have anything you want if you are willing to give up the belief that you can't have it.” – Robert Anthony